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ABSTRACT

Small communities require the services of professionals such as doctors and teachers, but most professionals are trained in metropolitan areas. Urban-trained professionals are seldom prepared for the social and cultural differences that confront them when they move to rural communities. Such newcomers frequently experience culture shock--the stress brought on by unfamiliarity with a new social or cultural context and the inability to predict other people's reactions in the new context. Several sociological models relevant to culture shock are reviewed. These include Tonnies' concept of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft relationships; Durkheim's idea of mechanical versus organic solidarity; and Dillman's notion that community relations are influenced by community size, stability, homogeneity, and overlapping institutional memberships. These latter variables influence many rural-urban differences in social dynamics, including differences in enactment of social norms, in "initiating roles," and in the nature of primary relationships and mutual obligations. Professionals relocating to a small isolated community need to consider the implications of living in a Gemeinschaft context. Ten strategies are listed that will help any person through the stages of culture shock, followed by additional suggestions related to professional isolation, professional status, and self-concept. (SV)

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Orienting New Professionals To Small Isolated Communities

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Orienting New Professionals To Small Isolated Communities

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Abstract

This paper addresses personal and interpersonal problems experienced by newcomers who accept professional positions in small isolated communities. Gougeon suggests that many newcomers who move to new communities experience a form of culture-shock. Gougeon reviews several sociological models drawing on the works of Tonnies, Durkheim, Dillman, and Connor. He argues for a more intuitive interpersonal model that derives from the area of Sociology of the Family Literature and may hold greater utility for newcomers. Finally, Gougeon critiques the model and explores how it may prepare new professionals moving to small isolated communities.

Small communities do not generally have major educational and economic institutions and therefore lack the resources to prepare its local citizens to serve its own members. Communities require services of professionals including doctors, teachers, nurses, lawyers, administrators and managers; and most professionals are trained in metropolitan area institutions. After graduation, professionals frequently relocate to rural areas to secure employment. Many find work in small isolated communities.

Professionals, although well trained to respond to situations in their field, are rarely prepared for social differences that confront them when they move to new rural communities. Many cultural differences exist between large urban environments and small isolated communities. This paper will explore how to orient professionals to rural community life during their training programs. I will first introduce the concept of culture shock, review Tönnies', Durkheim's, and Dillman's understanding of intrinsically and extrinsically motivated relationships, and finally explore strategies to help professionals set reasonable expectations for cultural differences.

Culture Shock

Culture is one's sense of familiarity with long-standing social conventions, religious behaviours, expectations, values, attitudes and beliefs, traditions, physical environment, and deeper-level, intuitive connections with the broader universe. In a more general sense, culture shock occurs when people must learn to deal with the stress brought on by changes in home life, friends, job, and/or cultural environment (Hachey, 1998). Culture shock is a term used to describe the stress brought on by all these changes. It is the response to unfamiliarity of social conventions of a new culture, or if familiar with them, being unable or unwilling to perform according to these rules (Furnham & Bochner, 1989). Expatriates living in a new culture experience uncertainty and anxiety because they cannot predict comfortably people's reactions to them. This is especially true when they find themselves in a religious or social context that is unfamiliar. Expatriates experience loss of security when they experience uncertainty.

After examining the literature on culture shock, it is generally agreed that people experience it in predictable stages. Most report that there exists four or five stages. Funham and Bocher report that expats first experience elation and optimism in anticipation of experiencing a new culture, then frustration, confusion, confidence and finally satisfaction (1989). Storti reported that expats first experience a honeymoon stage, followed by a stage of hostility and aggression, adjustment, and finally acceptance (1990). Yang reported that expats experience excitement, disillusionment, confusion, and finally positive adjustment (1992). Hachey identified the following stages: Honeymoon Stage when you can't wait to see and experience everything, Anxiety Stage which is associated with homesickness, boredom, sleepiness, irritability, and compulsive behaviour, Rejection or Regression Stage when you find yourself becoming antisocial (rudeness, excessive drinking) or seek out safe havens like a Canadian Club, and finally the Adjustment Stage during which time you experience a measure of bi-culturalism (greet people in local language, hail a cab, etc) (1998). Hachey suggested that there are usually two low points in a person's experience overseas – the first point coincides with the anxiety stage and the second stage often comes in the Rejection stage and may be more serious and profound than the first. But people finally reach the fourth stage of Adjustment.

In each case the expat is initially excited and optimistic but quickly becomes confused and frustrated. During this stage people feel anxiety, and self-doubt becomes central. Then as the expat interacts with people from the host country and is able to begin to meet affiliation, connection, and collectivity needs with others, the expat becomes more optimistic again and becomes more willing to adjust. After several months at this stage, the expat slowly becomes more acceptant. I argue that professionals moving to small isolated communities experience culture shock, and understanding stages one will predictably experience, they may move through the stages more effectively.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation Experiences

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In the late 19th century, Ferdinand Tönnies, a German sociologist, examined the nature of relationships people entered (Sorokin, 1928). He described two: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* relationships. A Gemeinschaft relationship was described as a natural relationship, one that might exist between a mother and child. Motivation to maintain a Gemeinschaft relationship might be love or intense affiliative needs. On the other hand, a Gesellschaft relationship was described as a relationship that yields rewards based on cost-benefit calculations. The motivation to maintain a Gesellschaft relationship might be a "bottom line" or some payment in cash or kind. Therefore a Gesellschaft relationship is conditional on the expectation that profit will result, and that a person's individualistic needs are being met. Rural sociologists quickly discovered that this typology was useful in understanding the different experiences one has in rural versus urban environments. They identified that more interactions in small isolated communities were Gemeinschaft in nature compared to interactions that people in urban or metropolitan areas experience. People from urban areas experienced more Gesellschaft relationships.

Durkheim, a German sociologist, also argued that two types of relationships existed (Sorokin, 1928). He called a relationship that created homogeneity of individuals and binds people into one solid unity (a collectivist tendency) Mechanical Solidarity. The force that unified people was a sense of strong unanimity of public opinion, based on the mental and moral homogeneity of individuals. Mechanical Solidarity is similar to Tönnies' Gemeinschaft. The other relationship identified by Durkheim was created by the division of labor seen to be critical in the Industrial Revolution. Workers needed each other and could not exist without cooperation because everybody would do only a special part of the work. Durkheim called this phenomenon Organic Solidarity and it is similar to Tönnies' Gesellschaft. Rural sociologists preferred to use Tönnies' concepts, probably because of Durkheim's unfortunate choice of names for his concepts, for they did not characterize the phenomena well.

Don Dillman, a rural sociologist, suggested that all communities have four variables that result in fundamental differences effecting social interaction and social dynamics of its members: Smallness, stability, similarity, and overlapping institutional memberships (Dillman, 1987). In urban centers there is a large population, people tend to be job-focused and therefore move more frequently, the workforce tends to be varied and complex, and people live in relative anonymity from each other. In small isolated communities, the population is small, people tend to be place-bound and focused on the community more than they are on a particular profession or job, the workforce tends to reside in one or two major resource-based industries and people tend to understand them, and people seem to live in a 'goldfish bowl' where everyone seems to know what everyone else is doing.

Many differences in social dynamics between an urban context and a rural context can be traced to these variables. Generally, *goals* are enacted differently in urban and rural contexts. In rural contexts social norms tend to be set and maintained informally whereas members of urban communities tend to set and maintain them formally. Decisions are often made in rural communities to suit the particularities of the membership whereas in urban settings decisions are made to meet a more community-wide, universal standard.

Another difference in social dynamics that occurs as a result of the four variables can be called *initiating roles*. In rural communities members are generally expected to take on complementary roles, whereas complementary roles are not as important in larger urban areas. People in rural areas are often given roles based on their family background, whereas in urban areas, people are generally required to possess a particular skill set to take on a job or a role. People in rural communities tend to value traditional experience held by elders or old-timers whereas in urban areas people tend to rely upon expert authority to solve their problems.

A third difference in social dynamics that occur as a result of these variables can be called *following roles*. In rural areas neighbours tend to have relatively unlimited obligations to one another, whereas in urban areas, obligations to neighbours are more specific and often limited. Rural community members generally pride themselves as being self-sufficient and capable of solving many different types of problems where urban people are not. Rural people tend to be more aware how their actions might affect other people in the community, and therefore act with greater group oriented than people in cities. And finally, on a daily basis, rural people tend to experience higher quality and quantity of primary relationships compared to people in cities. This may be a result of the sheer numbers of people one interacts with in a day. People living in an urban context will see as many if not more people on a daily basis, but fewer of them will likely be good friends or family, and therefore they will experience more secondary relationships.

Considering the works of Tönnies, Durkheim, and Dillman, a theme is revealed. The theorists reflect a polarity of social experiences. Tönnies' Gemeinschaft, Durkheim's Mechanical Solidarity, and Dillmans's rural characterizations all reflect intrinsic qualities while their Gesellschaft, Organic Solidarity, and urban characterizations reflect extrinsic qualities. Intrinsic qualities are associated with feelings of well-being derived from within ourselves. Intrinsic qualities lead to feelings of self-worth, intimacy, adequacy, and security. They also

lead to experiences with the community that result in feeling a sense of identity, adventure, opportunity, and status. On the other hand, extrinsic qualities are associated with feelings of honour/shame, acceptance or rejection, potency or manipulation, and autonomy or coercion. They also lead to experiences with a community that result in feeling a sense of admiration or social isolation, challenge or self-estrangement, success or powerlessness, and dominance or meaninglessness (Mitchell and Spady, 1977).

Intrinsic and extrinsic experiences are not predominantly rural or urban, but people who more consistently interact in secondary relationships might have higher quality extrinsic and lower quality intrinsic experiences. Predictably, professionals who grow up in metropolitan areas are more likely to feel comfortable with Gesellschaft relationships than professionals who grow up in small isolated communities. Therefore they might expect to set and maintain social goals formally, live without concern for maintaining complementary roles, depend upon expert advice, give to neighbours in a conditional manner, and generally interact with strangers on a daily basis.

Professionals who relocate to a small isolated community need to consider what some implications are to live in a Gemeinschaft context. This context might demand that social goals be set and maintained informally, and that decisions they make may need to meet the particular requirements of individuals within the community. It might also mean that professionals live a life that is appropriate for their status and position in the community, and that the professional learns to value traditional wisdom in place of rational expertise. Professionals may need to contemplate what it means to have neighbours who consider them to be renewable resources, expecting them to provide assistance whenever necessary unconditionally. Finally professionals need to consider what it will be like to live in a community where everyone seems to know what they are doing every minute of the day.

Strategies to help Professionals Set Reasonable Expectations for Cultural Differences

Moving to a small isolated community, to many, may be a genuine cultural change. In this case, professionals who move to culturally different communities may experience the stages associated with culture shock. Hachey suggested several strategies to help a person through the stages of culture shock. 1) Get out and socialize with the locals and try to learn about your new community. 2) Stop being over critical and over examining people's behaviours and habits. 3) Try to learn the local idioms or language and practice it in public. 4) Find a local person as a mentor or supporter. 5) Remain curious. 6) Do something stereotypically 'urban' every once in a while. 7) Stay on email with family and friends back home or keep a diary. 8) When confronted with expectations that are difficult to meet, find imaginative ways to circumnavigate them without offending people. 9) If you are too overzealous about your work, you might have to reduce your expectations. And finally, 10) Accept that you are going to fail at things and prepare yourself for this as a natural phase of adjustment (1998).

In addition to these strategies, professionals must understand that they will experience loneliness and loss of connection with friends and families. When our affiliation needs are not being met, we feel unbalanced and often struggle with the accompanying sense of loneliness. To help, it is a useful strategy to remember our sense of self when our accustomed relationships are so radically changed. When we move from a metropolitan areas to a small isolated community we can expect no longer sensing honour, acceptance, potency, and autonomy. We may be used to feeling admiration, challenge, success, and dominance over our workplaces back home. We achieved these feelings from demonstrating skills of technical prowess, establishing a high moral standard, being demanding to details, and acting in a politically appropriate manner. Therefore, professionals must expect to experience fundamental changes in how they perceive themselves.

However, in small isolated communities, many of these skills and attributes are not as highly valued as possessing traditional wisdom, being charismatic, claiming fundamental rights, and demonstrating self-reliance. These authentic experiences lead to feelings of self-worth, intimacy, adequacy, and security. They also lead to experiences with the community that may result in feeling a sense of identity, adventure, opportunity, and status. However a person cannot experience these feelings just because they have prior achievements that were gained outside the community. They can only be experienced through relationships with community members, and this will take time, even years. So an important strategy a professional needs to adopt is to lower personal expectation[illegible]e patient, and therefore be more open and accepting to [illegible]ferences.

Conclusions

Professionals tend to move to small isolated communities to gain employment and they encounter culture shock. Considering Tönnies, Durkheim, and Dillman's characterizations of communities they can understand the fundamental nature of relationships that may occur. Drawing on Mitchell and Spady's concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, professionals can create a gestalt of one's experience with others and with the community.

Finally, using this information, professionals can better prepare themselves by lowering and realigning expectations, and understanding that self-esteem and acceptance will likely be dependent upon interactions they have with community members on a daily basis, and not on skills, knowledge, or status that they may bring with them from outside.

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